

THE CONVOCATION OF THE STATES  
GENERAL, 1789.

A THESIS  
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# I

## Outline

- I. The States General demanded by the Parliament of Paris.
  - A. Struggle between the parliament and king over taxation.
    1. Debate upon the Stamp tax July 2.
      - a. Results of Session.
        - (1) Speaker appeals to the States General.
        - (2) Supplication to the king voted.
    2. Mention of the States General in Assembly of Notables.
    3. Remonstrances against the Stamp tax adopted July 6.
      - a. Presented to the king July 8.
    4. Minority vote for the States General July 9.
      - a. King refuses statement of accounts.
      - b. New Remonstrances drawn; Adopted July 12.
    5. Majority vote to express wish for States General to King July 16.

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## II

- a. Addresses of Sabathier de Cabu and Semonville.
  - b. Significance of the decree.
  - c. Formulation of the remonstrance.
    - (1) Accepted July 24; presented to king July 26.
6. Only States General declared to have right to authorize taxes July 30.
- a. Opposition to the Assembling of the States General develops.
  - b. Motives for the demand.
  - c. King's displeasure. Decides upon forced registration.
7. Registration of the Stamp and land tax August 6.
- a. Bed of justice had been foreseen.
    - (1) Councils against it.
  - b. The king's Declarations; Principles of the French Monarchy.
  - c. Protest of the parliament of Paris.
    - (1) Declares registration null and illegal August 7.
    - (2) Renewal appeal to States General August 13.

### III

B. Parliament's exile to Troyes August 15.

II. The Decrees of the Courts of Paris and of provincial parliaments, lead to the parliament's recall and the king's promise for the States General.

A. Situation after the exile of the parliament of Paris.

1. Hesitation and indecision of the Government.
2. Publication of reforms.
3. Increased hostility to the Queen.

B. The Demand for the States General reiterated and defended.

1. By the Courts of Paris.

a. The Cour des Comptes.

- (1) Monsieur registers the edicts.
- (2) The court's declaration, August 8.
  - (a) Registration null and illegal.
  - (b) Taxes must be consented to by the States General.

b. The Cour des Aides

- (1) Edicts registered by the Comte d'Artois.

#### IV

(2) The courts declaration  
August 18.

(a) The Registration declared null and illegal.

(b) Supplication to the king for the States General.

c. Attitude of the people in Paris.

2. By the Parliament of Paris at Troyes  
August 22.

a. Persists in its decrees of  
August 7 and 13.

3. The Cour des Aides repeats its demands.

4. The king annuls the decrees of the Parliament.

a. Decree of Council Sept. 2.

5. The provincial parliaments defend the action of the parliament of Paris. Demand States General.

a. Orenoble, August 21.

b. Besancon, August 30.

c. Bordeaux,

d. Roussillon,

e. Toulouse,

f. Bordeaux, October 21.

h. Toulouse, September 1.

V

C. The Recall of the Parliament of Paris.  
September 21.

1. Reconciliation and concessions.

- a. The Government withdraws the Stamp and land taxes.
- b. The parliament registers the edict for the extension of the second virgtieme.

2. The Rejoicing of the people.

D. The king promises the States General.  
November 19-21.

1. Attempt of the Parliament of Paris to reach an understanding with the Government.

- a. The States General to be promised in the preamble of the edict of loans.

2. The Royal Session of November 19.

a. Proposal of the government.

- (1) States general vaguely promised in five years.

b. Members of parliament press for a more speedy convocation.

- (1) St. Vincent.
- (2) D'Espremesnil.
- (3) Ferrand.

## VI

- c. The King orders the registration of the Edict of loans.

### 3. After session of November 19.

- a. Parliament declares that it had no part in the registration.

### 4. The king arrests Sabathier de Cabu, and Freteau, and exiles the Duk d'Orleans.

### 5. The king renews the promise of the states general November 21.

- a. The Parliament's delegation to the king.
- b. The king declares his word sacred. States general to be convoked in five years.
- c. The Parliament supplicates to hasten the time.

## III. The Press and the Clergy demand the states general; the parliament continued resistance; Edict promises the states general July 8, August 8.

### A. The Press.

1. "The necessity for assembling the States General."
2. "Supplement to the Remonstrance of Parliament."
3. "Dissertation upon the right to convoke the States General."



## VII

4. "No Bankruptcy" - (Point de Banquerote).
  5. "Observations of a Republican."
  6. "Conference between a Minister and a Councillor."
  7. Point de Banquerote, continued.
- B. The Parliament of Paris continues its resistance.
1. Protest against the imprisonment of the members of parliament. Lettres de Cachet.
    - a. Remonstrances voted November 27.
      - (1) Against imprisonment of members.
    - b. Decree against Lettres de Cachet January 4.
      - (1) Annulled by the king.
    - c. The Parliament draws up principles of the Moranly January 18.
  2. The question of taxation resumed; Protests against the Session of November 18.
    - a. Report of Committee April 11.
      - (1) Attacks the Guard of the Seals.
      - (2) Declares the States General to be the only resource for creditors of the State.

## VIII

### b. The king's reply April 17.

- (1) All was legal - the session of November 19.

3. Contemporaries express fears as to what the assembling of the States General may occasion.

4. The Parliament's remonstrance of April 30.

a. Attacks despotism.

b. Declares the nation itself to be the only resource for the nation.

### C. The Coup d'Etat of May 8.

1. Events indicated that a coup d'Etat eminent.

a. Parliament learned of the Government's designs.

2. The Intention of the Government denounced May 3.

a. D'Epremesnil.

b. Constitution of the French Monarchy drawn.

3. The king arrests two members of parliament May 5-6.

a. Troops are stationed around the hall.

b. Arrest of Monsabert and D'Epremesnil.

## IX

### 4. Change of Administration registered Bed of justice May 8.

#### a. Reform of the judiciary.

##### (1) The Cour pleniere.

#### b. The reduction of the power of the parliaments.

##### (1) They become simple courts of justice.

##### (2) Registration of edicts, the Cour pleniere until the meeting of the States General.

### 5. Discontent throughout the kingdom.

#### a. Pau, Lanquedoc, Roussillon, etc.

### D. The Clergy appeal to the States General.

#### 1. The king requests a Don gratuit.

##### a. Only a small amount granted.

#### 2. The Remonstrances of the Clergy.

##### a. Attack the Cour pleniere.

##### b. Requests States General for the levying of taxes.

##### (1) The Bishop of Blois.

##### c. Renewed Remonstrances June 15, Theminis.

**X**

(1) Nation alone can grant subsidies.

(2) "Assemble the nation and be invincible".

**3. The king's reply.**

a. Had promised states general.

b. Would convene them at all times when circumstances required.

**E. Edicts announcing the States General; Recall of Necker.**

**1. Edict of July 5.**

a. Called for information and opinions from all parts of the kingdom.

b. Adverse criticism of the decree.

**2. Edict of August 8.**

a. Announced the time of assembly for May 1, 1789.

b. Place undetermined.

**3. Recall of Necker. August 25.**

a. Edicts did not produce tranquility.

b. Brienne's loss of prestige.

c. Necker's plans and problems.

(1) Question of the parliaments; Representation to the States General.

## XI

(2) Decree of Council, September 23.

(a) Suspend the Cour pleniere.

(b) Necker's apology for the government.

### IV. The Contest over Double Representation.

A. The Parliament of Paris calls for the form of 1614.

1. Registration of Necker's decree, September 25.

B. General agitation throughout the kingdom.

1. Clubs and Organizations.

C. The Second Assembly of the Notables; November 6.

1. Called to consider Composition, Convocation and order of elections to the states general.

a. All Bureaux but one declare in favor of equal representation of three orders.

2. Memoirs of the princes.

D. Necker endeavors to concilliate the Parliament of Paris.

1. Conference with D'Eprenesnil.

2. The parliament (December's) recedes from its position of September 25; Determination of the Composition placed in the hands of king.

## XII

### E. The Press.

1. "Petition of Citizens of Paris",  
December 8.
2. "Advice to Parisiens".
3. Memoirs upon the states general".
4. "To the French Nation on the Views  
of its government".
5. "Necessary conditions for a legal  
states general".
6. "Advice to the third estate."
7. "Exhortations to the three orders of  
Languedoc."
8. "Consideration upon the injustice of  
the Pretensions of the Clergy and  
Nobility."
9. "The Government - Senate - Clerico -  
Aristocratique."
10. "Philosophy of the French People."
11. The Glory in equals of the people.
12. "What is the third Estate?"

### F. The Result of Council December 27.

1. Necker wishes double representation  
for the third estate.
2. Opposition in the Council Meeting.
  - a. Necker resigns.
    - (1) Queer intercedes.

### XIII

3. Necker returns. His views accepted and published.

4. Address of thanks. Six corps of Paris.

G. Letters of Convocation, January 24.

1. Question of single chamber left unsettled.

PREVIEW

## I

### The Convocation of the States General in 1789.

The meeting of the states general of 1789 marked a crisis in the history of the French revolution. Here the great middle class for the first time since 1614 represented in a national assembly, found an instrument that enabled it to establish its political supremacy. Sweeping away all class privileges, it created equality before the law and limited the power of the monarch by the establishment of a constitution.

How did it come about that an assembly so obviously dangerous to a king by divine right, and to the privileged classes was called into being? It is the purpose of this paper to answer this question by the most significant chain of events, connecting the assembly of the notables of 1787 with the royal edict of 1789, which called for the election of deputies to meet in national assembly.



1. Bachaumont, XXV, 277; Dorset, 212, (July 5);  
Flammermont, Remonstrances, III, 663.
2. Lois anciennes, XXVIII, 402: "Nous avons consid-  
ere qu'il porterait principalement sur des actes  
qui ne sont multiplies parmi nos sujets qu'en  
proportion de leur richesse, et des avantages  
qu'ils retirent de ces actes sous la protection  
de notre autorite." (Quotation from the pre-  
amble of the edict).

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In the situation which led to a demand for the states general the financial condition was the preeminently important feature, and the convocation may be regarded as being directly due to the struggle between the king and the parliament of Paris over taxation. The real contest began July 2, 1787 with the opening of the discussion upon the stamp tax which had been brought to the parliament for registration June 22.<sup>1</sup> This tax seems to have been chosen by the government because it promised to afford a revenue which could be derived mainly from the wealthier classes who did not bear their fair share of the financial burden of the State.<sup>2</sup>

The edict required a government stamp to be placed upon all writings which were issued to the public, such as letters, announcements, invitations, newspapers and journals; upon all agreements, such as wills and contracts; upon the official records of educational institutions, such as diplomas and degrees; and upon all transactions, whether civil or religious, judicial or military,

1. Lois anciennes, XXVIII, 415: Derogons a toutes lois, ordonnances ou reglements contraires aux dispositions de notre presente declaration, notamment a aucunes provinces de notre royaume, meme aux pays d'etats, autres que celles confirmees par l'art. 5 de notre presente declaration.  
Art.5: Il ne pourra etre expedie aucun certificat d'etude ou d'inscription dans aucune des facultes dependantes des universites, ni aucunes lettres de doctorat, licence, baccalaureat, maîtrise es - arts, qu'en papier ou parchemin timbre, a peine de 300 lir. d'amende solidairement encourue par l'impetrant desdits certificats ou lettres, et par celui ou ceux qui les auront signes. Dispensons neanmoins de la necessite du timbre les certificats d'etudes ou autres delivres par nos avocats ou procureurs generaux.
2. Bachaumont, XXV, 271.

and of the state or of the individual. From among the numerous details of the edict two important provisions stand out prominently because they appear to be an attack upon privilege. The first, as has already been noted, provided for the bulk of the new tax to be collected from the wealthier classes. The second provided for but very few exceptions in favor of the privileged provinces and cities of the kingdom. Perhaps this increased the antagonism of the parliament of Paris, which was composed of members of the privileged classes.<sup>1</sup>

Long and interesting discussions were occasioned when the tax was taken under consideration July 2. Many members spoke, with such power and emphasis that Bachaumont likened the assembly to the parliament of England.<sup>2</sup> The speakers almost invariably chose to denounce one of three things, the extravagance of the court, the nature and provisions of the tax or the question as to whether the king or parliament had the power of taxation.

D'Epremesnil led the attack upon the prodigality of the court. According to Bachaumont, he spoke

1. Bachaumont, XXXV, 271, 278-78; Dorset, 212, (July 5); Gallier, 82. The last two sources merely state the nature of the session and the subject of the discourses; they agree with the fuller account of Bachaumont. The account of the session in my text is based upon Bachaumont, the only one of the sources which gives an analysis of the speeches. Gallier gives no date for the session, but his account so agrees with the events of the second of July that the conclusion that he is describing the events of that date is justifiable. His statement is as follows: L'impôt du timbre fournit matière aux memes discours, a des declamations sur les malversations du ministere, sur les prodigalites de la cour, sur la misere des peuples!

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"particularly upon the excess of expenditure and dared to discuss that of the royal family itself stating that it had been carried to a point of which no other sovereign gave an example. He protested against the independent establishments of the brothers of the king and of their august consorts, and said specifically that it was immoral and impolitic for the queen to have an establishment separate from that of the king.<sup>1</sup> This digression produced such a sensation that the Comte d'Artois, filled with indignation, several times showed a desire to rise and speak in order to arrest the effervescence of the orator. But Monsieur, more calm, held him by the sleeve and prevented him from crying out.

"The tax itself was attacked by Freteau who observed that it was exactly eight hundred years since the Capetian family had mounted the throne; and in that time the nation had been afflicted with continually increasing taxes and of all kinds, but never yet had one been proposed which was so

oppressive, so confused, so susceptible of extension, and consequently so dangerous. Another member, the Abbe Salomon de Poncroise, observed that the edict du timbu was not so new as it was believed. It had been considered under the reign of Louis XIV, but its danger to that monarchy was represented so energetically that, absolute though it was, it had renounced the tax.

"The question in regard to the power of taxation and as to who held that power was raised by two members. The first sustained the principle established in the assembly of notables that the king did not have the right to establish perpetual taxes. The second maintained that the court of peers, were able to grant taxes; that right pertained to the assembly of the nation.

"The decision reached by the assembly was that the stamp tax, being so extremely complicated and detailed, having so many articles and being of such great length and so difficult of comprehension required a serious and detailed discussion, and ought to be examined by commissioners; but above all

1. Bachmann, XXV, 278-79.

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